

**Testimony on H.R. 4340 the “SALAMANDER Act of 2019”
Congressman Hakeem Jeffries
September 24, 2019**

Good Afternoon.

I would like to thank Chairman Jared Huffman and Ranking Member Tom McClintock of the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife for taking the time to consider H.R. 4340, the “Supporting Activities & Leadership Abroad to Move Amphibians Nearing Decline or Extinction to Recovery Act of 2019” or the SALAMANDER Act. It is not often that a Brooklyn-native gets to advocate for the importance of amphibian conservation and natural habitats, and I am grateful to have that opportunity today.

Currently there are about 6,887 identified species of amphibians around the world. Most live in small, concentrated populations with scarce resources. Amphibians also have permeable skin that makes them particularly vulnerable to environmental disturbances, including disease, pollution, gradual changes to temperature and climate and other environmental factors.

As it stands, nearly 70% of amphibians are either threatened by extinction or are in decline. That means an overwhelming number are in desperate need of conservation strategies to avoid extinction.

Amphibians are a keystone in many ecosystems, and their disappearance is expected to result in dramatic environmental changes.

Thriving amphibian species not only help improve their environments, but also provide benefits to human health, including by preying on mosquitos and helping prevent the spread of diseases like malaria. In addition, with many amphibians playing a vital role in the research of innovative drugs, the rapidly increasing disappearance of the species could create new health and national security risks.

Because of the importance of amphibians around the world, I am proud to sponsor the “Supporting Activities & Leadership Abroad to Move Amphibians Nearing Decline or Extinction to Recovery Act of 2019” or the SALAMANDER Act. This bill would restart the Amphibians in Decline Conservation Fund, created by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2010 to address the global amphibian crisis.

The Amphibians in Decline Conservation Fund previously operated over the course of six years, distributing over \$1,000,000 and leveraging an additional \$2,600,000 in matching funds for amphibian conservation

projects. Through this, the Fund supported 40 projects in 25 countries.

The SALAMANDER Act reactivates this productive and important program under federal law to help prevent the extinction of these imperiled amphibian species. The bill outlines criteria to ensure that federal funds are targeted at the species most in need of conservation with strong oversight to ensure that federal funds are well spent and that safeguards are in place to ensure the support of indigenous peoples and local communities.

It authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to carry out a competitive grant program for the conservation of highly endangered amphibian species as designated on the International Union Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Eligible applicants for the grant include wildlife management authorities of a foreign country with a natural habitat of a highly endangered amphibian species or any person or group with demonstrated expertise required for the conservation of a highly endangered amphibian species.

Conservation activities supported in the bill include those for recovering and maintaining health populations of amphibian species, supporting compliance with relevant conservation laws and providing important scientific information relating to amphibian conservation.

This legislation is a bipartisan effort to conserve and protect a vital species to our world's natural habitat. I appreciate the leadership of my colleague Rep. Peter King for joining me in sponsoring this bill and working on both sides of the aisle to support conservation projects for amphibians.

Thank you again for your time and for considering this important legislation.